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Superintendent Statement: June 16, 2015 (IMAGES AND VIDEO AVAILABLE)

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary marks 13 years of whale rescues

More than 9,500 feet of line recovered to free 22 whales

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary (HIHWNMS) reports that the close of 2015's whale season marks 13 years of whale rescue operations by the Hawaiian Islands Disentanglement Network.

Since its inception in 2002, the network has freed 22 large whales from life threatening entanglements. More than 9,500 feet of larger gauge line has been recovered from entangled whales.

The sanctuary and partners have also helped free many other marine animals, including sea turtles, mantas, dolphins, and monk seals. The primary objective is to work together to gain information in order to reduce the threat in the future for humpback whales as well as other species.

HIHWNMS is releasing newly edited footage and images from the most recent large whale disentanglement in February, 2015, plus unique imagery of a compelling 2013 rescue of a young humpback, the first calf ever cut free by the team.

The footage from 2013 shows a humpback whale calf with a life-threatening tight wrap of line around its body, being accompanied by its mother. The crew used a specially designed knife on a long pole to cut the line and free the calf. The rescue earlier this year documents the disentanglement of an adult humpback whale with tight wraps of heavy gauge line around its tail and trailing hundreds of feet behind.

Marine mammal entanglement, or by-catch, is a global problem that every year results in the death of hundred of thousands of whales, dolphins, porpoises and seals. For large whales, the impact is typically not immediate as the animals can pull gear off the ocean floor and swim off with it.

Freeing a 45-ton animal in the open ocean is dangerous for animal and rescuers. As a result, response requires authorization and permits under NOAA Fisheries' Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program and the state of Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources. Responders, as seen in the imagery, are well trained and equipped.

The Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary works with its partners: NOAA Fisheries, Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources, the U.S. Coast Guard, fishermen, the tour industry, and others to lead a community-based network to respond to large whales in life threatening entanglements.

Malia Chow, Superintendent,
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

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Media: High resolution images and video available for download:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B1HAcgn3pb-Ffmx3V2NQMzY4bGpfZS01Y21LeXNfN0tXd1g4UHZ3ZXQ3RjhMcicyNmpXTlk&usp=sharing>

On the web:

Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Entanglement:

<http://hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/res/entanglement.html>